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***Georgians in Tabriz and Rasht: a Historical Study on the
Role of Georgian Militias in Iranian Constitutional
Revolution***

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Abstract

Constitutional Revolution, as a significant turning point in the history of Iran, shook Iranian society. What has been more or less neglected in examining this movement is the role of non-Iranian forces. The Caucasians, especially the Georgians, should be considered the most passionate and self-sacrificing pro-constitutional forces who spared their lives for the victory of the Iranian movement. The question of this paper is what the role and performance of the Georgian forces in the Constitutional Revolution was? The hypothesis is that, despite the persecution of the Russian Tsarist government, Georgian revolutionaries organized by parties such as Hemmat and Ejtema'iyun Amiyuun, presented in the battlefields of Tabriz and Guilan and, due to their previous experiences, played a vital role in the success of the constitutionalists. On the other hand, the Georgian Press could form public opinion in favour of the revolution, inform about Iran's events, and create a stir among the Iranian Mojahedin by focusing on news of the events in Iran. It should not be neglected that Iranians presence in the Caucasus cities, especially Tbilisi, also helped to transfer revolutionary concepts to Iran and fan the flames of the revolution.

Keywords: Georgia, Constitution, Iran, Georgians, Press.

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Introduction

The Constitutional Revolution, as a significant movement in the history of Iran, initiated many significant changes. Iranians, tired of the tyranny and incompetent monarchs, raised the banner of Freedom and tried to establish and strengthen the rule of the constitution to get rid of a long period of oppression and underdevelopment. Ulema and businesspersons, along with artisans, intellectuals and women, all participated in this movement, which resulted in a significant turning point in the history of Iran. Apart from the role of internal forces in the Constitutional Revolution, the influence of foreign revolutionaries in this glorious movement should not be overlooked. At a time when the Mohammad Ali Shah forces were going to extinguish the trembling flame of constitutionalism forever and quench the last cries for Freedom, the constitutionalist Mojahedin (militias) formed a resistance front in Tabriz and Guilan, which revived hope in the hearts of Iranians and led to the overthrow of the tyrants. What needs to be explored in detail is the role of Caucasian activists, especially Georgian ones, in resisting tyranny. They were able to help the Iranian revolutionaries to resistance the front and heartened them by using their skills in the best way. This help was so important and influential that, according to one of the authors, it was only because of this assistance that Tabriz resistance lasted so long and led to the defeat of government forces (Chaqueri, 1998, p.89). On the other hand, many Iranians living in the Caucasus, especially Tbilisi, played an essential role in transmitting progressive ideas and raising awareness about Iranian events through their contacts and relations with Caucasian organizations and revolutionaries. The Georgian Press and publications were essential factors in awakening the public opinion of the Caucasus, especially the revolutionary activists and their subsequent association with the Iranian Constitutional Revolution.

Sources pointing out the active presence of Georgian forces in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution are divided into two categories: Iranian and non-Iranian sources. The most critical non-Iranian sources are the reports of a Georgian revolutionary named Velasse Magladze, published in 1910, which, of course, did not receive much attention at the time of publication. Sergo Gamdlishvili and Apalon Japaridze have also made objective observations of the Constitutional Revolution.

Important contemporary Iranian sources include those cited by Ahmad Kasravi, Edward Browne, Nazim al-Islam Kermani, and several other writers who more or less wrote about the contributions of Caucasian activists, especially the Georgians. Using pages of books, documents and memoirs of these different authors, this article tries to analyze the critical role and influence of the Georgian fighters in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and shed new light on this crucial but less known history.

Georgia and Iran: A Historical Review

The relationship between Iran and Georgia is a long-standing one. The first connection between the two countries dates back to the seventh century BC, and since then, Georgia and the Georgians have played a significant role in the governments and Iran's states and people. Due to its unique geographical location, Georgia has always been a crossroads for the conquerors from east to west. Over the years, Iran and Georgia have influenced each other culturally; for example, in the contemporary Georgian language, we come across many Persian words and names derived from the **Shahnameh** (Book of Kings) by Ferdowsi. Georgia's wealth and suitable facilities made this country an attractive target for the invasion of various monarchs in different historical periods. The Safavid dynasty, meanwhile, made the most attacks on Georgia. For example, Shah Ismail, Shah Tahmasb and Shah Abbas invaded Georgia under the pretext of jihad and spreading Isla, killing many Georgians and gaining much property. Precisely, Shah Tahmaseb I invaded Georgia four times with the same motive, and during these invasions, he captured many Georgians and moved them to Iran. Shah Abbas I, like the previous kings, invaded Georgia successively and brought enslaved Georgians to Iran and settled them in areas such as Isfahan, Fars and Mazandaran (Romlu, 1996, p.247). Nader Shah Afshar and Agham Mohammad Khan Qajar also continued this process of bloodshed, looting and raiding. Of course, it goes without saying that despite these sufferings, the Georgians in Iran quickly rose through the ranks, as at the end of Shah Tahmasb's reign, they formed an influential and powerful class in the Safavid court, and people like Allah Verdi Khan, Imam Qoli Khan and Gorgin Khan held some of the most important government positions.

Iran-Georgia Relations in the Qajar Period

According to a hadith from Imam Sadeq (PBUH), God values three cities among other cities: Qom, Kufa and Tbilisi (Majlisi, 2007, pp. 60& 214). Apart from the authenticity of this hadith, perhaps this may be considered a good entering into the discussion of the status of Georgia and especially Tbilisi between Iranians, a city that had attracted many Persian poets, writers and rulers. Georgia, and especially its capital Tbilisi, has always had close ties with Iran, and, since the 18th century, Iranians have historically been of the city's most important and influential Muslim groups. For centuries, relations with Iran have been one of the most important aspects of Georgia's historical engagement in the Middle East. The consolidation of Russia's political influence in the Caucasus and Georgia's political affiliation with this state - especially after Agha Mohammad Khan's bloody invasion of East Georgia - also failed to break these ties. Even after becoming the political, administrative, and economic centre of the Caucasus, Tbilisi maintained its long-standing ties with Iran, especially in the trade and economic spheres, where even amid the Iran-Russia war, the Russian customs chief reported that Iranians and other Asian traders offer all kinds of goods in Tbilisi, which were sold in good priced (Gocheleshvili, 2007, p. 61).

The old quarter of Seyedabad was the main dwelling for a large group of Iranians living in Tbilisi until the 19th century. These Iranians included a wide range from the officials, writers and poets to political activists and thinkers such as Fazel Khan Garossi, Shafi Sultanbek, Abu Nasr Sheibani, Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh, along with diplomats of the Iranian consulate in Tbilisi, businesspersons and artisans. After becoming the Russian Empire's administrative and economic centre on the east, Tbilisi became an attractive destination for trade and immigrants from the near East and Europe. After Georgia's annexation to Russia, Tbilisi's low customs tariffs led many European businesses to consider the city an important base of influence in Iran. A significant event that brought Tbilisi to the attention of Iranian immigrants was the connection of the Black Sea port of Puti to Tbilisi in the second half of the 1860s by rail, as well as the exploitation of the Tbilisi-Baku railway in 1882, which led to the more prosperity, and welfare of this city. This played an essential role in the development of trade and the improvement

of the quantity and quality of the service sector and its political and cultural situation (Group of Writers, 2001, p. 202). Increasing the economic, political and cultural power of Tbilisi had a significant impact on attracting Iranian job seekers with those who were going to be exiled due to the political oppression in Iran. Thus, by the twentieth century, the social composition of Iranian immigrants in Georgia and the Caucasus in general changed, and the number of seasonal workers among them was increased. **Vaqaaye Ittefaqiyah**, reporting from a Tbilisi-based newspaper named **Kavkaz**, estimated that the number of Iranian residents in Tbilisi in 1858 had amounted to 5,000 (**Vaqaaye Ittefaqiyeh**, 1858, p. 5). Mirza Mohammad Hossein Farahani also estimated the number of Iranian citizens in 1885 in Tbilisi and surrounding villages over four thousand (Farahani, 1983, pp.79-80). Arfa al-Dawlah, then Consul General of Iran in Tbilisi, recorded the number of Iranians living in Tbilisi in 1890 as ten thousand (Arfa al-Dawlah, 1966, p. 316).

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Iranians were of the largest non-Georgian group in Tbilisi in such a way that, according to the 1897 census, about 63% of the Tbilisi non-Georgian inhabitants were Iranians (Gocheleshvili, 2007, p. 61). Due to this increasing growth, in 1906, with the help of Iranian businesspersons and the official representative in the Caucasus, an Iranian school was opened in Tbilisi. In fact, Mushir al-Molk, Iran's ambassador to St. Petersburg, in numerous consultations with Russian officials, asked them to allow Iranians in Tbilisi to form a charity association and establish a school (Habl ol-Matin, 1904, p. 7). Mirza Yahya Dolatabadi writes:

A few years ago, when education was emphasized everywhere in Iran, Iranian officials abroad made vigorous attempts to make Iranians literate. They established in the Caucasus, with the help and encouragement of Mirza Hossein Khan Mushir al-Dawla, the ambassador of Iran in Russia, a charity association for Iranians in Tbilisi. They also planned a good chart to build a school named **Ittifaq**, which was greeted by the Russian government. Unfortunately, after the closing of [the Russian] parliament by reactionary forces, the association does not work (Dolatabadi, 1992, p. 17).

The school held classes in Persian, Arabic, Turkish, Georgian, French and Russian languages, as well as religion, geography, music, etc. Persian newspapers such as **Qeirat** and **Sharq**, published in Tbilisi, and later Molla Nasreddin, since the beginning of the twentieth century, printed articles in Persian (Gocheleshvili, 2007, p. 64).

Georgia and the Constitutional Revolution of Iran: Activists, Organizations, and the Press

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, as a distinct phenomenon, was influenced by various factors that, without any of them, undoubtedly, there would have occurred an important gap in the movement. One of the most critical influences arose by forces that were mainly present in the Caucasus and especially in Tbilisi. Tbilisi was known as the most important cultural centre of the Caucasus in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This city has been considered as one of the major centres of Iranian migration since the mid-nineteenth century. Many Iranians who worked in oil refineries and factories in Baku had close ties to working communities and trade unions in the Caucasus and were in contact with and influenced by indigenous revolutionary groups. These groups included Social Democrat Committee or Ejtema'iyun Amiyuun. The connections between members of this organization and Iranian immigrants dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Ejtema'iyun Amiyuun was formed in Baku in 1905 and consisted of Iranian populations in the Caucasus and had close ties to the Russian branch of the Social Democratic Workers' Party in Baku and Tbilisi (Afary, 2006, p. 114).

The need for a working force was so great in the Caucasus that successive new groups of workers came from Iran to replace those who had left or been fired. At that time, these workers were mainly important and active elements in the relations between the Iranian and the Caucasian revolutionaries. In addition, they were in constant contact with their homeland and, most importantly, contributed to the spread of revolutionary ideas from the Caucasus to Iran. Many of these Iranians later returned from the Caucasus to accompany the constitutionalist warriors of Tabriz and other parts of Iran. It would be fair to say that the Caucasus Iranians, on the one hand, had an outstanding contribution to the development of progressive ideas among the Iranian society,

especially in the northern states, and on the other hand, impacted the formation of Caucasian public opinions pro Constitutional Revolution.

The help and support of the Caucasians were very practical, especially in the early stages of the revolution. In this regard, for example, Chaqueri concluded that only because of this help from the Caucasians made Tabriz resistance front last so long, and the defeat of government forces took place (Chaqueri, 1998, p.89).

Georgian Internationalists and Revolutionary Organizations in the Caucasus

Ejtema'iyun Amiyun of Tbilisi

From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, the authoritarian regime in Russia faced stubborn opposition that had formed nuclei of resistance inside and outside the country. Among these opponents were Plekhanov and a few of his colleagues who, in 1883, formed the Social Democratic Party outside Russia (Ra'isniya, 1978, p. 14). After the establishment of the Social Democratic Workers' Party, opponents of the Tsarist government from other non-Russian nationalities such as Caucasian Muslims, Armenians and Georgians also joined it (Adamiyat, 1975, p.12).

Ejtema'iyun Amiyun had set up a branch in Tbilisi to help the Iranian revolution in order to coordinate its relations with the Iranian revolutionaries. Revolutionary groups sent by the Ejtema'iyun Amiyun of Tbilisi and Batumi were among the first assistance cells to reach the Tabriz and Guilani Mojahedin from the Caucasus. In fact, not only Tbilisi and Batumi but also other Georgian cities, such as Khashuri and Gori, responded to the Iranian revolutionaries' help and supported the Mojahedin of Tabriz and Guilan.

Ejtema'iyun Amiyun ostensibly carried out this organization and sending of aid in order to perpetuate the Iranian constitutional resistance, but in the Georgian volunteer nuclei, a very diverse ideological view prevailed. A member of the Guilan Resistance Front, Mikhail Bogdanov, notes that among the members of these volunteer groups sent from Georgia to Iran were the Menshevik, Bolshevik and anarchist Social Democrats.

The help of Azerbaijani revolutionaries in Baku, as well as Iranian-Armenian groups, accompanied supporting the resistance front of Iran. There seems to have been an extraordinary closeness and cooperation between the Ejtema'iyun Amiyuun of Tbilisi and Baku. The Party became a place for smuggling illegal Social Democratic pamphlets and leaflets, published in Europe by the Social Democrats, to the Caucasus, which were distributed throughout the Russian Empire. From the beginning of the constitutionalist movement in Iran, Baku became one of the most important bases in support of Tabriz and later the Rasht resistance groups. During the constitutional movement, Azerbaijan and Guilan always enjoyed the ideological and technical support of the Baku revolutionaries and the Baku Social-Democratic groups (Gocheleshvili, 2007, pp. 64-7).

Rabino, the British consul in Rasht, refers to the Social-Democratic Committee of Iranians in the Caucasus in a report on December 31, 1906, and wrote that In Baku, there was a sect of Mojahedin who had an underground organization named Ejtema'iyun Amiyuun. They were also called Ferqeh in Tbilisi and Baku (Rabino, 1989, p. 65). According to him, the members of this organization amounted to six thousand just in Baku, most of whom were Iranian immigrants, merchants and businesspersons. Also, Rabino mentioned Georgians and some Armenians and Russians who cooperated with Ejtema'iyun Amiyuun. They made Explosives such as rifles, pistols, and dynamite in their Laboratories and, despite the Russian secret police arrested many of them (Rabino, 1989, pp. 65-6).

The Tbilisi revolutionaries had strong ties to the Iranian revolution. They welcomed Iranian representatives who came to Tbilisi in order to obtain support. For example, Karim Khan, the brother of Mu'izz al-Sultan, one of the influential personalities of Guilan, supplied 200 pounds for the Rasht revolt and travelled to Tbilisi and other parts of the Caucasus five times with some of his trusted comrades to obtain the necessary weapons and ammunition (Browne, 2018: 450).

Hemmat

The Russian Social Democratic party was divided into "Bolshevik" (revolutionary) and "Menshevik" (moderate) factions. The Bolshevik

faction sought to recruit workers from the Baku oil industry, but since the majority of the workers were Muslim and Turk and it had a sizeable Armenian presence, they were reluctant to join the Party (Yazdani, 2016, p. 153). For this reason, some local and Bolshevik leaders of the Party, including Stalin Aziz Bekov and Zapadre, formed the Hemmat organization, which was initially under the influence of the Bolsheviks, but this condition changed, and the Menshevik group, which were more moderate, dominated it (Ittihadiyeh, 1982, p. 66). Thus, the Muslim revolutionaries of the Caucasus in late 1904 found a political organization headed by a doctor named Nariman Narimanov and individuals like Mohammad Amin Rasoulzadeh were prominent members.

In addition, many Iranian immigrants in the Caucasus were associated with the Hemmat organization. Through their relationship with this organization, they helped the constitutional revolution in Iran; According to Kasravi, after the constitution, since they were aware of the difficulty of the progress of the constitutional struggle, they sent representatives to different cities and formed their branches in Tabriz, Mashhad and other cities (Kasravi, 2014, p. 194). In fact, the role of this organization in establishing relations between Iranian immigrants and inside Iran was prominent.

By attracting and training Iranian workers, this organization played a major role in the growth of the political consciousness of Iranian immigrants. In addition, Hemmat gradually established various branches in other cities of the Southern Caucasus, such as Ganja, Shusha, Nakhichevan, and Jolfa, but the Tbilisi branch was of particular importance to the Iranians because it played a significant role in supporting the Iranian constitutional revolution. It sided with the Bolsheviks during the split in the Bolshevik and Menshevik factions of the Russian Workers' Social-Democratic Party and, under the influence of the Georgian Mensheviks, pursued Menshevism (Salmasizadeh et al., 2012, p. 62).

Georgian Revolutionaries

There are not many sources about the role of Caucasian revolutionaries, especially Georgians, in the Iranian Constitutional

Revolution. Among the non-Iranian sources is a report by Velasa Magladze, known as Tria, of the famous Georgian revolutionaries, which was published in 1910. We can also mention the memories of Georgians such as Sergo Gamdlshvili and Apalon Japaridze, who fought on the resistance front. Iranian writers such as Kasravi, Nazim al-Islam, and Edward Browne have also made some references to this critical issue in their works. (*Georgia and the Constitution, Baharestan Message*, 281) Therefore, based on existing sources, documents and writings, the important role of Georgian activists is examined.

Among the most important events that led to the increasing presence of Georgian forces in the Iranian revolution were the events of Tabriz and Guilan. As mentioned before, the Social Democratic Committee set up a branch in Tbilisi to assist the Iranian revolution, where it was decided that assistance to the emerging Tabriz Resistance front should be given priority due to its importance. According to the Georgian revolutionaries, after the events of Tehran in 1908, Tabriz had become the centre of Iranian constitutionalism and, therefore, keeping the flame of resistance in this city burning was very important for the movement. Megladze's reports show that Georgian activists did their best both in Tabriz and Rasht. According to him, the Tbilisi Committee recruited two of the most important Georgian revolutionaries, Sergo Gamdelshvili, a member of the Guilan resistance front who had fought in the Manchurian front, and Sergo Gagoshidze, a fighter of the Tabriz resistance front. The Georgian warriors were a regular regiment; many of them at the time had the experience of participating in the 1905 Russian Revolution (Afary, 2006, p.310).

In a special report by Megladze to the central body of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party, one can understand the role of the Caucasian revolutionaries in helping the Iranian Mojahedin. He, who was one of Sattar Khan's deputies, wrote that the Tabriz revolutionaries asked the Ejtema'iyun Amiyuun for help, but the party-affiliated workers volunteered to be sent to Azerbaijan without waiting for the Party's permission. As a result, a special force of revolutionaries with military experience was sent to Tabriz in small secret groups. It seems that a total of about 500 to 800 Caucasian revolutionaries entered Tabriz. The Tbilisi Committee of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party sent

135 Georgians led by Sadrak Bonovarian (Kasravi, 2014, p. 753). Kasravi, referring to the role of the Social Democratic Party in his Constitutional History of Iran, writes that many workers affiliated with this Party asked to be sent there to help the Tabriz resistance front. Although most of these volunteers were Georgians, there were also people of different nationalities, such as Armenians and Jews. While history has forgotten the names and memories of many of these activists, some of the most critical Georgian revolutionaries are:

Sergo Gamdlishvili was born on February 15, 1889, in the village of Avlevi of Tbilisi. His service in the Russian Tsarist army in the 1904-1905 war with Japan led him to recognize the inefficiency of the Tsarist regime. Anti-tsarist feelings take root in him. In Baku, he became a member of the Ejtema'iyun Amiyuun and soon after, like many other Caucasian revolutionaries, he was sent to Guilan by the Baku Social Democratic Committee. His years of experience in the Russian army led him to become an active member of the Resistance Front, often taking on various missions. Gamdlishvili stayed years in Iran after the conquest of Tehran and then returned to Tbilisi. Shortly afterwards, he was arrested and executed by the Tsarist regime in 1910.

Apollon Japaridze was one of the most famous Georgian revolutionaries who lived under many pseudonyms but was better known as Mikhail (Misha) Tratiants. Japaridze was born in 1888 in Racha, Georgia. In 1905 he became a member of the Social Democratic Party of Tbilisi and in 1908 left for Guilan to help the Iranian constitutionalists. He was wounded several times during the Iranian wars but eventually returned to Georgia. He is mentioned in historical sources as a very trustworthy person (Gocheleshvili, 2014, p. 226).

Grigol Ordzhonikidze, nicknamed Sergo, was another important Georgian activist born in 1886 in Ghoresha, Georgia. He began his political career in 1903. Between 1907 and 1912, he was arrested, imprisoned and deported three times for his membership in the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party and for his anti-government activities. He fought the White Army in the Russian Civil War, and after the victory of the Bolsheviks in Georgia, Azerbaijan and the Caucasus, which led to the establishment of the Socialist Republic, he became the chairman of the Caucasus-Georgia Committee (Raein, 1976, p.44).

Ordzhonikidze even became a member of the Politburo and was the second person of the People's Commissariat after Lenin. He also held critical key positions under Stalin rule (Khlevniuk, 1995, p. 56).

In 1909, the Russian Social-Democratic Party sent Urzhenikidze, who was an active supporter of the Hemmat Party and the Social-Democratic Organization, to Rasht at the head of a group of Caucasian Bolsheviks. According to Grigor Yaghikian (Elikean), he was at the head of the first and most important group of revolutionaries who entered Rasht. After the fall of Mohammad Ali Shah, he came to Tehran and there, with his direct participation, formed two revolutionary groups to fight against the Shah and counter-revolution. He was in Iran until November 1910, and during this period, a series of actions such as translating part of the Communist Manifesto., Established the International Club to contact Iranian revolutionaries with foreign ones, distributed foreign revolutionary Press, founded political clubs for workers in Rasht and Anzali and held discussion sessions to promote and explain Marxism and the 1905 Russian Revolution (Yaghikian, 2007, p. 514).

Vlasa Mgeladze, alias Teria was active in the Russian Revolution and was a member of the Menshevik government of the Autonomous Republic of Georgia. (Gocheleshvili, 2006, p. 11) After the occupation of Georgia by the Red Army, he immigrated to Paris and died there in 1943. During the battles of Tabriz, Tria came to Iran and fought with the constitutionalists against the forces of tyranny. He prepared a report on the developments and events in Tabriz and the performance of the Caucasian and Transcaucasian Social Democrats who had participated in the constitutionalist struggle and presented it to the Eighth Congress of the Second International. In addition, in May 1910, he gave lectures in several European cities on the situation in Iran and the activities of the Social Democrats in Iran. At these conferences, a resolution was adopted in support of the Iranian revolution and condemning the intervention of the great European powers in Iran (Khosropanah, 2019, p.89).

In a letter written by Vaso Akhatchaturi to Plekhanov on November 19, 1908, he reported that On November 7, 1908, while the Iranian Mojahedin were advancing on the Maragheh front, a bomb exploded in Tria's hand, injuring his right palm and two fingers had been wounded. The letter also states that since Tria was a well-known figure for the

commander of the Julfa border fortifications, he was likely to be identified and captured by tsarist forces (Khosropanah, 2019, pp. 89-90).

Grigol Emkhvari or Emukhvaria was born in West Georgia to a noble family. While studying at the University of Novosibirsk, Emkhvari renounced his aristocratic privileges and joined the revolutionaries. Sali was killed in a battle near Tabriz (Gocheleshvili, 2014, p. 225). Veliko Bakradze, Viktor Nasaridze, Lazare Gachechiladze and many others are among the revolutionaries who participated in the revolution and tried to resist the autocratic regime.

Among the volunteers, there was also a woman named Gulchina Lortkipanidze, who was known as Leila among the revolutionaries. Born in 1881 in Akhalbediseuli, Georgia, she was a brave, courageous and fearless woman who hides a revolver in her hair. In 1905 in Megrelia, he collaborated with Davit Asatian, Vladimir Demurias, and Isaki Chochias and went to Iran through the Batumi Social Democratic Committee (Amirkhizi, 1960, p.304).

The measures of Georgian forces in Iran

One thing to keep in mind about the presence of the Caucasian militias is that the presence of these vigorous volunteers should be considered in light of the dangers that threatened them. After the 1905 Russian Revolution, the Tsarist authorities firmly were sensitive to the activities of these groups, and these activists were forced to carry out their operations covertly. The Russian government was strongly opposed to the Iranian constitutional movement, barring Caucasian forces, particularly Georgian fighters, from cooperating with Iranian freedom fighters and imposing harsh punishments on violators of this rule. This led to the arrest of many members of the Social Democrats, who fell into the hands of the Tsarist forces both before and after their arrival in Iran and on their return to the Caucasus. For example, many Georgian internationalists, such as Giorgi Zaridze and Kako Korinteli, who regularly travelled to Iran despite many difficulties, were arrested after returning to Georgia and were executed.

There are some interesting points about the performance of these volunteers from the available texts and reports. Almost all available reports and analyzes indicate the decisive influence of these Mojahedin

in the process of struggle for their order and experience. According to Afary, the Georgian fighters were experienced fighters who acted very carefully and calculatedly and were able to organize the situation of the Mojahedin Corps (Afary, 2006, p. 310). For example, in the memoirs of Tria, it is mentioned that after the decision of the Tbilisi Committee to form and send militant groups, Sergo Gamdlishvili, a member of the Guilan Resistance Front Sergo Gagoshidze, one of the fighters of the Tabriz Resistance Front, was recruited. According to Fakhraei, among the Georgians who secretly entered Rasht under the revolutionary commander of Valikov, there were experienced combatants, making grenades and bombs in their hide-outs and identifying sensitive areas of the city (Fakhraei, 1977, p. 117). These fighters showed great courage and valour during the combats of Guilan. For example, a group of Georgians led by Mu'izz al-Sultan stormed the garden of the Modiryye outside the city, during which Sardar Afkham was killed by tyrannical forces. Another group, commanded by Valikov, attacked the administration centre, combated to Cossacks and reactionary forces, which led to their surrendering three hours after a three-hour battle. About sixty volunteers took part in the uprising, thirty to thirty-five of whom were Georgians (Ezam Ghodsi, 2000, pp. 214-6).

Reports by one of the Georgian militia in Tabriz shows that organizing and sending help from Tbilisi played a decisive role in the victory of the front. The skilled and experienced Georgian groups soon became necessary and influential forces of the battles. Ahmad Kasravi, who himself was closely involved in many events of the Constitutional Revolution and narrated first-hand reports about the incidents, wrote about the arrival of one of these Georgian forces in Tabriz: "... of this Georgians, all are brave and fearless fighters. The arrival of these brave men in Tabriz brought great joy among the Mojahedin" (Kasravi, 2014, p. 754).

According to Kasravi, many of them who had a history of war presence and were familiar with making ammunition and bombs came to help revolutionaries with guns, bullets and other ammunition. In his view, the arrival of these militias in Tabriz in 1908 spirited the besieged people of Tabriz in two ways;

On the one hand, they realized that the reputation of their actions was

spread everywhere and that Iranians had supporters among the Caucasian nations. On the other hand, they were brave and courageous warriors who showed great skill in warfare. They made bombs in their secret laboratories which were very influential in future wars" (Kasravi, 2014, pp. 752-4).

There were several key factors that made Georgian groups a staunch opponent of any royalist troops. As mentioned before, Georgian volunteers had a brilliant record of participating in rebellions of Georgia and the Russian Empire. Some of the volunteers were veterans of the Russia-Japan war, and many of them took part in the 1905 Russian Anti-tsarist revolution. Those who did participate in the war took part in an armed uprising against the tsarist authorities in West Georgia. Another important factor that made their role more prominent was their extensive and skilful use of the bombs and grenades they made their labs or brought with them to Tabriz and Rasht. Based on this period reports, West Georgia insurgents were skilled in overcoming obstacles and even wire-tapping (Chehabi and Martin, 2013, p. 131). Georgian militias taught new methods of warfare to the Mojahedin and were themselves a strike force in the dangerous moments of the war, which explains why the tsarist agents considered them the backbone of the Tabriz resistance (Yazdani, 2018, p.98).

All these factors turned the Georgian troops into an extraordinary auxiliary force for the Tabriz Mojahedin. They significantly increased the military strength and raised the revolutionary spirit of the besieged Tabriz. Regarding the supply of weapons and ammo to the Iranian Mojahedin, it should be noted that some of the required weapons were brought to Tabriz by Caucasian volunteers. An efficient network brought weapons to Tabriz, some of whom were members of organizations such as Hemmat and the Social Democrats in Tbilisi (Javid, 1964, p. 85).

In addition, the uncompromising and revolutionary spirit of these Mojahedin should be mentioned. Due to their involvement in anti-Tsarist wars, these people also considered the Iranian revolution as a continuation of their anti-authoritarian struggles and saw it as a war against the ruling class and aristocratic privileges. Many of the Georgian volunteers were young people who had abandoned their families and aristocratic privileges, filled by ideas of the universality of the

revolution, and saw revolutionary internationalism as the only way to ultimate victory. In their view, the success of the Iranian revolution was an essential step towards the victory of the revolution in their homeland. According to the reports, they even played an active role in the decisions of the Tabriz Revolutionary Committees to Rasht, and for example, were able to thwart the efforts of the Russian consul in Tabriz to persuade the Tabriz resistance front to negotiate with the monarchists. In some cases, they were even more radical than their Iranian counterparts were (Chehabi and Martin, 2013, p. 128).

These skills and assistances raised the concerns of the tsarist authorities. For example, the Russian viceroy of the Caucasus in Tbilisi, Count Vorontsov Dashkov, informed the Minister of Colonies about the events in Tabriz and warned about "the significant presence of Georgian, Armenians and Tatars (i.e. Azerbaijanis) on the Iranian border." He also pointed out their prominent role in the events of Iran.

Georgian Press

Developments in Russia in 1905 provided a fertile ground for the spread of liberal ideas, increased the political consciousness of the masses and mobilized them to step out of the circle of subsistence life and strive to participate in self-determination. The breaking of the shackles of the pre-revolutionary world increased the audacity to raise issues related to social life. Consequently, for example, dozens of newspapers and magazines, as well as hundreds of writers and poets, emerged in the Caucasus. By content and inclination, these Presses can be broadly divided into four groups after 1905, p. 1) social-democratic, 2) democratic, 3) moderate and, 4) reactionary press (Ra'isniya, 1978, p. 89).

Each of these magazines and newspapers represented certain layers of the public. While the social democrat Press embodied the ideals of the working class and their ideology, the moderate ones mainly dealt with the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. These newspapers were the result of reflecting the social contradictions and the libertarian tendencies of the people, and in the midst of the intensification of the class struggles, they fulfilled the task of drawing people's attention to the other aspects of public life.

Now, we come to the third contribution of the Georgians to the constitutional movement: the role of the Georgian Press in conveying the truth of Iran's events and making the public opinion of Georgia familiar with its conditions. The problem was that, due to Iran's status in Russia's interests, the Russian authorities closely monitored Iran's incidents. They tried to use media to represent Iranian Mojahedin as a bunch of outlaws who know nothing but killing, looting and savagery. Since the Caucasus environment was culturally developed and people were highly educated, the importance and influence of this medium were unquestionable. In this sense, Georgia experienced a culturally unique atmosphere in the early twentieth century and had a dynamic and important press that played a significant role in informing and influencing public opinion. The Georgian Press had experienced reporters who could cover the region with great speed and accuracy. Despite the tsarist influence in Georgia and the Caucasus in general, these newspapers were able to maintain their independence primarily and refrain from official propaganda of Tsarist Russian policies. For this reason, the Georgian Press published articles and reports that largely escaped from censorship (Gocheleishvili, 2002, p. 46).

The result was that the news published in these newspapers was very different from what the tsarist authorities were trying to convey through their propaganda apparatus. By doing so, these newspapers were able to promote modernist ideas and that the efforts of the Iranians would not be ignored. Since many Iranians lived in Georgia and were constantly on the move to Iran, the news of the events in Iran could not escape the sharp eyes of the Georgian media. Therefore, those newspapers such as **Talgha, Isari, Amirani, Ali, Chveni Khma, Imedi, Chveni Azri, Akhal, Skhivi, Momavali, Mnatobi** etc. regularly published reports and analyses of these events. The formation of the Tabriz resistance front and its aftermath was one of the most important topics in these newspapers so that detailed news and information about the events in Tabriz were published every day and Georgian public opinion became more and more sympathetic to the Iranian movement. The Tbilisi newspapers paid special attention to this issue due to the presence of Georgian volunteers in the ranks of the Mojahedin of Tabriz and reported and praised the victories of the front militias. In their reports, one can find an analysis of the social, political and economic situation in Iran. Some of the Georgian

revolutionaries who were present on the Iranian fronts also sent first-hand reports on the events of the battles to these newspapers and informed their compatriots about the sacrifices and bravery of the fighters. For example, **Ali** newspaper dispatched its own reporter to Iran, who published his reports in the fall of 1908. Another example was the **Chveni Kvali** newspaper, which printed journalistic reports under the alias Artemius. **Amirani** newspaper too published news and reports sent by its correspondent from Iran. The critical point is that this level of attention to the events in Iran only expressed the position and importance of Iran and its events for Georgians. (Gocheleishvili, 2002, p. 46).

Mullah Nasruddin, along with **Labour**, **Meraat**, **Lak Lak** and **Touti**, were of the moderate-line magazines that used humour and irony in order to accentuate social problems. It played an undeniable role in awakening public opinion, especially inspiring Iranian libertarians, so it is believed that Ali Akbar Dekhoda was strongly influenced by that in his **Charand-o-Parand**. Among the journals that used humorous language to express political and social issues, Mullah Nasruddin was more durable. It was published from 1906 to 1931 in Tbilisi by the efforts of Jalil Mohammad Gholizadeh and his colleagues such as Saber, Ali Nazmi, Mohammad Saeed Ordubadi, Ali Gholi Ghamgsar and Ozair Haji Begovic. According to the magazine's claim, more than half of its copies were sold in Iran. Gholizadeh, the editor of the publication, stated on April 28, 1906, that "Half of our customers are from Iran, that is, more than 15,000 copies of the magazine are published from Khorasan to Tehran, Isfahan and Tabriz, and even among the villagers." Even in one of the issues of **Sur Israfil** newspaper, there is an advertisement about how readers could have subscribed to Mullah Nasruddin.

Of its critical role, it is enough to say that Mullah Nasruddin established a new school in critical poetry, and some of its contents and poems, such as Saber's works, were so influential that it was said he had helped more than an army to the Mojahedin's of Tabriz. Saber, as a libertarian poet, composed about 20 long and short poems about the five-year struggles of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution.

In short, Mullah Nasruddin was one of the most influential and enduring Georgian publications, which had a profound effect on the region and Iran during the 25 years of publication, so that the journals

such as **Azerbaijan**, **Nasim-e Shomal**, **Hashrat al-Arth**, **Bohloul**, **Kashkul** and **Sur Israfil** were more or less influenced by it and some of its poems and articles were published in them (Ra'isniya, 1978: 97-106).

Conclusion

In the present study, the role and influence of Georgian activists in the Iranian Constitutional Revolution were investigated. Since the ancient past, the two nations of Iran and Georgia, despite all the ups and downs and misfortunes that have occurred, have never lost their common ties and have always helped each other in historical moments. The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, which was a significant attempt to build an ideal society under the rule of law and Freedom, immediately attracted the attention of Caucasian libertarians. Apart from the Iranians who lived in the Caucasus and Georgia for various reasons and returned home to join the constitutionalists in Tabriz and other parts of Iran, the Georgian activists who had a brilliant history of fighting against Russian dictatorships saw the Iranian movement as an important milestone at the history of the struggle against the dictators. That is why they looked, and that is why they responded enthusiastically to the call of the Iranians for help and spared their lives. The presence of these self-devoted individuals gave an international character to the Iranian movement and led to the defeat of the reactionary forces. The Georgian revolutionaries should be considered as the most passionate and self-sacrificing pro-constitutional forces who devoted their lives to the victory of the Iranian people's movement. Their presence on the fronts of Tabriz and Guilan and their bravery in the battles have been written in the reports of many attendees, both Iranian and non-Iranian. These warriors, who were very experienced and skilled, played an undeniable role in the victories of the Iranian Mojahedin. In addition, the use of weapons such as bombs and grenades, which many Iranian Mojahedin were not familiar with, was very influential in spiring Iranians and achieving instant victories. It is noteworthy that in some cases, the revolutionary ideas of these militias were even more radical than their Iranian counterparts. Because they saw the Iranian revolution as a continuation of their own anti-authoritarian struggles and took it as a struggle against the ruling class and aristocratic privileges, they played an imperative role in the irreconcilability of the constitutionalist forces, despite some promises to end the war. On the

other hand, the Georgian Press and publications also participated in this course by shaping public opinion and arousing the sympathetic feelings of the Georgian people through publishing news on the Iranian fronts. This Press, which in some cases even had journalists in important battles of Iran, did its job well in covering the Iranian news and exposing the crimes of the domestic tyranny front and its foreign accomplice, Russia.



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